

Remarks by Mayor Edward P. Zimmerman  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Presentation to Former Mayor Grace Gurisic  
January 5, 2009

Grace Gurisic grew up in Rocky Hill and attended elementary school in this very building. She lived in the house most of us know as “the Rafielli’s” but is actually now belongs to the Donahue’s, next to the post office.

At this meeting in January 1957, when the legal voting age was still 21, and a full nine months before this mayor was born, young Grace joined the Borough Council of Rocky Hill. In 1959 at the age 23 and a student at Rider College, Grace was sworn in as our first and only female Mayor and the youngest ever to serve in that position. In 1960 Grace went on to be the first and only Freeholder from Rocky Hill. She was also the first woman and youngest Freeholder in Somerset County history. In 1964 Grace was named Freeholder Director and from what Pete Palmer told me, I believe she was the only Democrat to ever hold the title in this county. Grace then went on to be the assistant to the director of what is now the State DEP followed by two and a half decades long tenure managing the offices of Congressman Roe up in Paterson. Grace now is a staff member of the NJ Board of Real Estate Appraisers.

Most mayors get sworn in while in their 40’s and 50’s and have a very low probability of achieving this unique 50 year milestone. So when I realized that we were coming upon this very special occasion I tracked Grace down and invited her here to be recognized. I have spoken to her twice by phone in preparation for this evening and I can tell you that listening to her tell me the stories of those days you can here in her voice how much she still loves this borough. When I listen to the stories from Toby and Ted Merritt and Martin about those days I have to laugh. It seems like a scene out of “Back to the Future”, campaigning by bike and then by a car with a loud speaker strapped to the roof. What’s even funnier about that is that about 1/3 of the current town, including where I live, was still just farmland. Here’s another comical part of all of this....you all just heard my comments a few minutes ago....when I went back and looked at the minutes from Graces era to get a feel for what was going on then, I read her comments from the 1960 meeting....you know what, after 50 years we are still working on sidewalk repairs and cleaning up the ordinances....some things just never change.

We are all really proud of the history of this borough and that Grace, as only the second woman mayor ever in this state and the youngest in the nation at the time was one of our own. We thank you for your service and hope to invite you back for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I’d now like to read a letter from Assemblywoman Denise Coyle.

If you would please join me up front for a small presentation of this plaque and some photo’s. Ladies and gentleman, the Honoroable Grace A. Gurisic, Mayor of Rocky Hill 1959-1960.